

ENVIRONMENTAL Fact Sheet



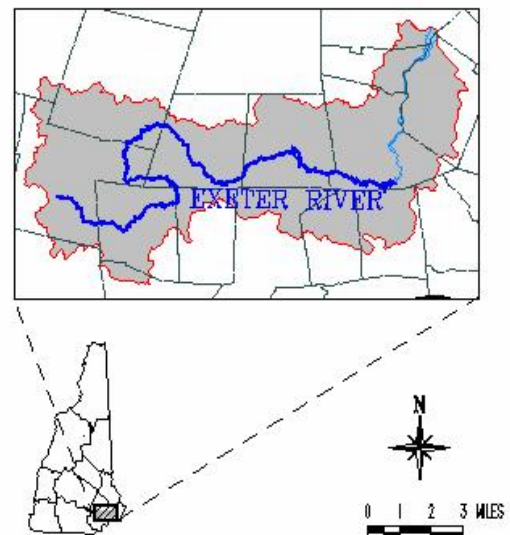
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WD-R&L-6

2008

The Exeter River

Broad wetlands, forested riverbanks, and gently-flowing waters, interrupted by short stretches of rapids and falls, combine to make the Exeter River an important scenic resource as well as habitat for a variety of wildlife species in southeastern New Hampshire. As a major tributary to the Great Bay National Estuarine Reserve, the Exeter River also plays a vital role in maintaining the overall health of the bay's environment. For these reasons, the river has been recognized not only by the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program, but as part of the NH Resource Protection Project. Great Bay is one of six high priority areas in the state recognized as a resource protection site. This designation places an emphasis on protection of healthy resources (rather than restoration of impaired resources) throughout that ecosystem. A high level of water quality must be maintained in the Exeter River not only because of these designations, but because it is the primary source of municipal water supply for the town of Exeter.



The Exeter River begins in the town of Chester, and flows east and north to the town of Exeter where it becomes tidal and changes its name to the Squamscott River, before emptying into Great Bay. Its drainage basin encompasses an area of 126 square miles. The upper 33.3 miles of the river, from its headwaters to its confluence with Great Brook in Exeter, were designated into the NH Rivers Management and Protection Program in August 1995.

Land use along the Exeter River is primarily rural. In the upper reaches of the river, through Chester, Sandown and Danville, there are scattered farms and single family homes and the riverbank is well forested and interspersed with large areas of wetlands. In the lower reaches of the river, from Fremont to Exeter, there is more industrial and commercial land use.

History

There are a number of sites of historic and archeological interest along the Exeter River. Falls along the river attracted European settlers to the area in the 1630s, as they were well known Native American fishing sites and great potential existed for their use in powering lumber mills. Many buildings in the area were constructed before or during the early 1700s. Exeter's Historic District is significant for its maritime history and early settlement and is listed in the national register. Several houses in Fremont are also eligible for national listing.

Wildlife

The federally-listed threatened bald eagle, known to winter at Great Bay, is among a number of endangered and threatened species found along the river and its corridor. An osprey nest at nearby Chapman's Landing is one of only two known nests in southern New Hampshire. Both of these threatened species rely on the riverine habitat for food and shelter. State-listed endangered brook floater mussels also inhabit the river.

Recreation

The town of Exeter owns conservation land and a public park adjacent to the river which provides opportunities for hiking and fishing as well as a boat ramp for access to the river. The public park also includes a picnic area and ballfields. In Sandown and Fremont, an abandoned railroad bed, owned by the State of New Hampshire, provides multiple-use recreational opportunities. There are a number of privately-owned campgrounds located next to the river that have facilities for seasonal camping, including one which offers canoe rentals. Hiking, jogging, and skiing opportunities are available on a trail system through a tree farm, owned and maintained by Phillips Exeter Academy, which has several miles of frontage along the Exeter River.

Fishing

The Exeter River is both a cold and warm water fishery that provides habitat for approximately 17 resident species. Naturally-reproducing species include small and large mouth bass, brown bullhead, chain pickerel, American eel, yellow perch and sunfish. The river is stocked annually with brook, brown and rainbow trout as well as shad by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department. Trout fishing is very popular in the upper reaches of the Exeter River, especially in the vicinity of traditional stocking points.



There is an ongoing anadromous fish restoration effort for river herring and shad, and the river also serves as spawning area for alewife and blueback herring. Fish ladders at Pickpocket Dam and Great Dam enable anadromous fish to reach upstream spawning and nursery habitat.

Boating

The generally free-flowing nature of the Exeter River provides excellent flatwater and quickwater boating opportunities for canoes and kayaks. Whitewater boating is limited to high water conditions. A 5-mile stretch above Fremont has been described in an AMC boating guide as "... the finest on the river for scenery ... and probably the best quickwater in the Piscataqua Watershed." Public and informal launching areas found at bridge crossings provide canoe and kayak access to the river. Motorized boating opportunities are generally limited to deeper areas of the river behind the Great Dam in Exeter. This stretch of the river is accessible from a municipally-owned boat ramp located at Gilman Park in Exeter.

For More Information

For further information about the N.H. Rivers Management and Protection Program go to <http://des.nh.gov/organization/divisions/water/wmb/rivers/index.htm> or contact Steve Couture, Rivers Coordinator, 29 Hazen Drive, PO Box 95, Concord, NH 03302-0095; (603) 271-8801; steven.couture@des.nh.gov.